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POLIOMYELITIS AND CRANBERRIES

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It is not necessary to possess a vivid imagination in order to picture the reader of this journal who, while calmly perusing its pages, pauses to glance again at the title of this paper to ask wonderingly what possible connection there can be between poliomyelitis and cranberries. Such a one may even set the writer in the class with the far-famed "Miss Smith of Bellevue" who was "a little simple." Is it to be a scientific or a culinary dissertation? Rest your minds at the outset, if you will go further with me and be assured that it is neither; in the former I have no desire to indulge, especially on the subject of poliomyelitis, about which so much is being said at the present time, and so little really known. As to the culinary end of the subject, that is another matter, on which perhaps, I might claim better qualifications for speaking but such is not the purpose of this paper. What then is the connection between these two widely differing subjects?

Come with me on a little journey into the Jersey Pines and we shall try to find the meaning, and if the subject can be put before you in even a little of its absorbing interest your time will have been well spent.

When my hospital sent the call for me to go to the Pines to look after the welfare of some seven hundred Italian cranberry pickers, who had just left Philadelphia to work on the largest cranberry bog in the country, all having taken their families with them, and many were known to have lived in districts infected with poliomyelitis (the disease at that time being epidemic in Philadelphia), it naturally followed that there might be among the hundreds of children some already infected with the disease.

Emergency hospital duty was an old story, so it was with a light heart that I turned to the resumption of this most interesting work, which had on many former occasions unfolded to my wondering vision so much of the real in life, the human interest, more than any other form of nursing had done.

Behold us then at the bog, having driven the two miles from the station in the automobile with a dozen or fifteen chattering, grimy, sons and daughters of Italy, who with their packs and baskets and babies formed a picturesque group when they descended with me from the train.

The first day was spent in getting located, and inspecting our little hospital, which was beautifully clean and ready, just a little, old, three-roomed house in the woods on a remote part of the bog (the bog meaning a farm of about one thousand acres divided into some thirty patches where the berries are cultivated). The two rooms downstairs were my hospital; the larger having a bed and cot, the other a good cook stove and refrigerator, with the other necessary appliances for a working kitchen. A gentle and generous hand had fitted out that little field hospital, and it was with a warming heart that I unpacked and made ready for use the bundles of old and delightfully soft sheets, pillow cases, towels and linen, warm blankets, and spreads, and comfortables that were comfortable, for September and October nights grow cold. Everything was as it should be, though all were hoping we should not need the supplies.

But to pass on, of course the acquaintance of the people must be made. So on the second day, the waiting automobile whirled us away to the bog where one-half of the people were already at work, the other half being always on another part of the bog, about a half mile distant, working in this way throughout the picking season in two sections.

My interest was at fever heat; here was a chance to study these people in their native element, for they are of the Italian peasant class who work in the fields of their native country and naturally seek like occupations when they adopt "the land of the free" as their own.

I was taken among them and introduced as "the new nurse who is going to help you keep the babies well," and everywhere smiling faces and flashing white teeth were met; the men, women and children seeming to be equally delighted with the situation and to accept the new nurse as a friend. Anything done for their babies reaches their hearts. The visit to the bog was a daily occurrence, watching the children, who, when old enough, pick with their parents, while the babies sit or lie in all sorts of perambulators under huge umbrellas or upon the ground on coats or pieces of blanket brought for that purpose when the parents come out in the morning.

Such happy bambinos! laughing, singing or playing, all as black and dirty as only a cranberry bog can make them, the vines giving off a black peat, which is almost like soot in consistency. Here was a mother nursing her baby; here a father who had stopped picking to give a tot a drink of "aqua" from a huge jug; here a boy or, mayhap, a tot of a girl playing in the ditch which runs through the bog for irrigating purposes, or another boy wading knee-deep in the clear brown cedar water, cooling his little legs in its limpid depths.

It is also new and interesting to listen to the snatches of song; one baby of three or four years wafted to my astonished ears the unmistakable notes of *Rigoletto*, shrill and erratic, but nevertheless true, "*La donna e' mobile*," showing that even among these ignorant peasants a love of real music was being handed down to what, let us hope, may prove to be an appreciative posterity.

Leaving the babies at play, let us turn our attention to those at work, for a word about the much-discussed question involved in this business, child labor. The cranberry industry has been forced very much into the limelight, and much adverse criticism has been leveled at the growers by reason of the children working on the bogs. They do work, it is true, but find me one unprejudiced investigator who will visit, inspect and report conditions as they really are, and such an one must in fairness admit that nothing but good, the best good, can come to these children from the work they do here. I am speaking only of this particular bog and conditions as they exist here. The children come from the alleys and slums of the city where they live in crowded, ill-ventilated tenements, or worse dwellings. Their recreation is found in the streets, their fresh air, we all know too well how little of the air they breathe is really fresh. Place them on the bogs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. where they pick berries or not as their parents wish, for let me explain here that while the owners allow them to pick and pay them the same rates as the adults, they prefer they should not, as they waste a great deal of the fruit, but having been brought here by the parents to help gather the harvest, their added earnings go to secure many a comfort in the long winter which otherwise would be denied them. I have seen them working awhile, playing awhile and eating awhile (they seem always ready for a chunk of brown bread and an onion) no one urging them to do aught but what their fancy dictates; but even those who work steadily all day are not doing laborious work, and the sweet open-air, laden with pine, and distant sea breezes, brings about swift changes in their appearance. Where on the first days pale faces and thin underfed bodies were all too numerous, in a short while one sees ruddy brown cheeks, puffed out and solid as an autumn apple, while limbs take on a contour and little dresses seem bursting with the expansion of little bodies. It is nothing short of marvelous how these children improve in the different environment, and my enthusiasm is the result altogether of the contemplation of its benefits. With all due respect to child-labor laws, which have their uses and abuses, who could but admit that these Italian children coming here from year to year are storing up health and energy during this time in the open that will be of incalculable value in their future lives?

After going among them for a time, one chubby baby of two years was found stricken with the dreaded "polio," and the visits to the bog ceased, our little hospital was opened to receive Freddie and his mother, and his nurse began the fight for his life. Fortunately his case proved to be one of the milder type, the paralysis being confined to the arms. After a couple of weeks it cleared up and Freddie began using his arms in a very much alive manner to the great delight of all concerned.

We were very comfortable in the field hospital, even though the nurse was the only member of the fraternity who could speak "Americana," but she soon became sufficiently familiar with their brand of Latin to make conversation a possibility, if not a long-drawn out pleasure. Warmer hearts and more willing hands could not be found, and bonds of real and lasting friendship with these simple peasants who would do so much for "La Bella Nursa" were formed and shall last.

After thirty days, with Freddie's convalescence fully established, we closed the hospital and he walked out a healthy, happy and lucky baby.

As no more cases developed during the remainder of the season and only trifling ailments of other character appeared, it was unnecessary again to open our hospital, and soon both the poliomyelites and cranberries were but memories,—memories, however, that shall live long in the mind and affections of one who so enjoyed her season among the colony of Italian cranberry pickers in the Pines of New Jersey.

BANKS EMPLOY WOMEN

Toronto banks have in their employ over 2500 women. These positions were formerly held by men who have gone to the front. The offices of bond, brokerage and other financial and business houses employ nearly 4000 women. Toronto is practically run by women and well run too. Surely women the world over are proving their value to the state and claim to equal recognition by men in government.